



Raccoons and turtle conservation

Raccoons, *Procyon lotor*, are a well known predator of eggs, hatchlings, and adult turtles. Some populations of turtles experience complete nest failure for many successive years due to raccoon predation. The variability in annual reproductive output and time to reach to sexual maturity causes some Midwestern species to be more greatly impacted by raccoons than other species.

Throughout most of the Midwest data indicates that raccoon populations are at record highs. Several factors are contributing to these numbers, but human subsidies have a large impact. Subsidies are provided not only in the form of increased food availability, but also in the form of additional human supplied refuge. Human supplied food subsidies come in the form of agricultural byproducts, garbage, and intentional feeding.

With the increasing suburbanization of our natural areas, raccoons are getting unneeded and unprecedented human assistance. At the same time, as natural areas become developed turtle populations become fragmented. This fragmentation disrupts population connectedness and exacerbates the effects of elevated raccoon predation.

Although raccoon predation is not the only conservation issue facing our Midwestern turtles, it is an important and significant source of turtle mortality. It is the position of Midwest PARC that efforts should be made to control raccoon populations, especially around critical turtle habitat. Turtles in general are extremely long lived and may benefit from even periodic relief from this source of predation.

Discourage feeding of raccoons. Make efforts to eliminate sources of garbage that may be accessible to raccoons. Do not feed wildlife.

Check local wildlife regulation. Releasing, rehabilitating, and feeding may already be illegal in many states or municipalities. Where present these regulations need to be enforced.

Do not provide raccoons with refuge. Secure vacant buildings to eliminate resident raccoons. Repair areas within used structures to ensure raccoons don't take up residents.

Open land to trapping. Most states allow for raccoon trapping. Developing a relationship with local trapper may be a viable solution. Care should always be taken to follow state trapping regulations.

Manage Raccoon populations. In some locations it may be most beneficial to initiate a raccoon control program, in accordance with local regulations. Raccoon control can easily be achieved by systematic trapping and elimination of captured raccoons. Raccoons should be humanely dispatched in accordance with the American Veterinary Medical Associations guidelines for euthanasia (http://www.avma.org/issues/animal_welfare/euthanasia.pdf). In the majority of studies, removal of raccoons has had a measurable impact on turtle populations. Whenever possible, raccoon management and turtle populations should be monitored in an effort to document your results.

Please see <http://www.mwparc.org/products/raccoons> for a List of Relevant Literature

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